

Original URL: <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/skill-builder/lesson-plan/48709.html>



## Main Idea: *The Great Kapok Tree*

Grade Levels: 1 - 3

### Objectives

This lesson is designed to continue working with primary students to find the main idea as a reading comprehension strategy. The lesson uses the book, *The Great Kapok Tree*, by Lynne Cherry, and has students complete a [graphic organizer](#) to find the main idea of each page, and then tell the main idea of the story. This is the third lesson of a set of lessons designed to teach about the [main idea](#) of a story.

This lesson builds on the introduction to finding the main idea, and assumes that you have already been working with your students on finding main ideas in texts. If not, you might want to use the [introductory lesson, \*Chrysanthemum\*](#). Finding main ideas is a key skill in the process of making sense of text.

### Materials

- *The Great Kapok Tree*, by Lynne Cherry
- Three-column chart on chart paper
- Copies of three-column chart to pass out to individual students

### Procedure

#### 1. Hook/Engagement

Say,

Today we're are going to read *The Great Kapok Tree*, by Lynne Cherry. The Kapok tree is found in the Amazon rain forest. Before we look at the book, let's talk about rain forests. What do we already know about rain forests? Where is the Amazon rain forest and what is it like? Show where the Amazon rain forest is on a map. Ask where other rain forests might be. (In a band around the equator.)

You might want to make a chart such as the one below.

Features of Rain Forests
lots of rain tropical climate many different kinds of animals snakes, monkeys, birds, alligators large, leafy trees produce oxygen few humans growing smaller

Read the description of the rain forest in the book, on the page opposite the title page, and have students close their eyes and make pictures in their minds while you read. Ask students to draw a picture of what they think that the rain forest looks like.

## 2. Vocabulary

There are several words in this book that may be unfamiliar to early readers. Here are some of them:

- **Kapok tree**-also known as a ceiba tree, a large tropical tree with large pods of silky floss used for making mattresses and life preservers
- **Generations**-one family after another; a measure of time
- **Ancestors** -families that came before us
- **Pollination**-how plants reproduce
- **Oxygen**-the gas we breathe to stay alive
- **Canopy**-a kind of roof formed by treetops
- **Amazon**-a river in South America; the largest in the world
- **Understory**-the plants growing on the ground, under the canopy

See the page opposite the title page for help in reviewing some of the vocabulary. You may want to introduce these definitions one at a time, as you come across the words in the story.

## 3. Measurable Objectives

Tell students that they will continue to work with finding main ideas. Ask students what a main idea is. They should respond that main ideas are the most important ideas in a text. Tell students that they can't really understand a book unless they understand the main ideas. During the lesson, you will help them find the main ideas in the different parts of this book. Later, they will tell you the main idea of the whole book.

## 4. Focused Instruction

Show students how to use a Who/What/Why chart as a way of summarizing some of the important parts of a book. Show a chart such as this:

Who?	What?	Why?

Read the first page, then say:

I want to retell the main idea of this page. I am going to reread it asking myself, "What is the most important information?" What kind of questions can I ask myself? I can ask myself who did or said what and why.

To answer who, I know there were two men so I write two men under Who. To answer what, I read and see that they entered the rain forest. So, I write entered the rain forest and one pointed to the Kapok tree under What. To answer why, I have to think and make a connection between the words, illustration and what I know. The words don't tell me why, but the

illustration does. The man has an ax, I bet he is going to chop down the tree. So, I write chop down the tree under Why. I will use the information on the chart to tell the main idea; two men entered the rain forest, and they were going to chop down the Kapok tree.

Who?	What?	Why?
two men entered the rain forest	one pointed to the Kapok tree	They were going to chop down the tree.

Read the next page, then say: Again I ask myself, "What is the main idea of this page?" Remember that the main idea can answer the questions who did or said what and why.

Fill in the chart talking about your thought process, the headings, and where to write what.

Who?	What?	Why?
the smaller man started chopping down the tree	then fell asleep	because he was hot

Explain that the main idea of the page is that the smaller man started chopping down the tree, but fell asleep because he was hot.

Read the next page, and continue filling in the chart with student input. Ask, "Who is saying something on the page? What did he say? Why?"

Who?	What?	Why?
the boa constrictor	said not to chop the tree down	because the tree was a tree where he and his ancestors lived, a tree of miracles

Explain that the main idea of this page is that a boa constrictor said not to chop down the tree because it was where he and his ancestors lived.

Read the next page. Fill in the chart with student input. Help students fill in the chart, with either words or illustrations.

Who?	What?	Why?
a bee	said not to chop the tree down	because his home is in the tree

## 5. Guided Practice

Pass out smaller versions of the three-column chart, then read the next page. Have students fill in the chart with either words or illustrations. Have them answer the same questions, "Who is saying what and why?"

Who?	What?	Why?
a troupe of monkeys	said not to chop the tree down	after you chop this one down, you will chop others and ruin the rain forest

## 6. Independent Practice

Have the students try filling in the chart themselves, one for each page. Continue until you reach the page with the child from the Yanomamo tribe.

Read the next two pages (when the man woke up and looked around at all the wonders of the rain forest) with the students. Have them fill in the chart on their own. As they are working monitor their progress. When they are done, have them share their charts with a partner finishing the sentence, "The main idea of this page is..."

Once your students have mastered using the chart to tell the main idea of the different parts of the story, have them use the chart to identify the main idea of the whole story. Ask them to look at the main ideas they have identified for each page of the story and think about the main idea for the whole story. Walk around and monitor their work.

Students may answer something such as:

Many different animals do not want the Kapok tree to be cut down because their lives depend on it.

## 7. Assessment

Review the student work for this lesson. The students' responses to the main idea for each page and for the whole story will determine who has mastered the skill of finding the main idea.

## Reflection and Planning

At this point it may be useful to reflect on how much progress you've made helping your students identify main ideas. Be sure to teach the process of identifying main ideas and supporting details in everything you read with your students. Some students will understand these concepts sooner than others. Introduce a range of different graphic organizers to help students think about the texts they read, how these texts are organized, what they mean, or what the author intends us to think and feel.

If students are still having difficulty distinguishing between a topic (what the story is about) and a main idea (what the author wants to say about the topic), don't worry. Finding "main ideas" is often difficult for students at this age level because it goes beyond the concrete details of the story to understanding of the essence of a story and the author's purpose.

For more lesson plans on finding the main idea, see [Main Idea: Chrysanthemum](#) and [Main Idea: Animals Born Alive and Well](#). There is also an introductory article on [Main Ideas](#) that you can reference.

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